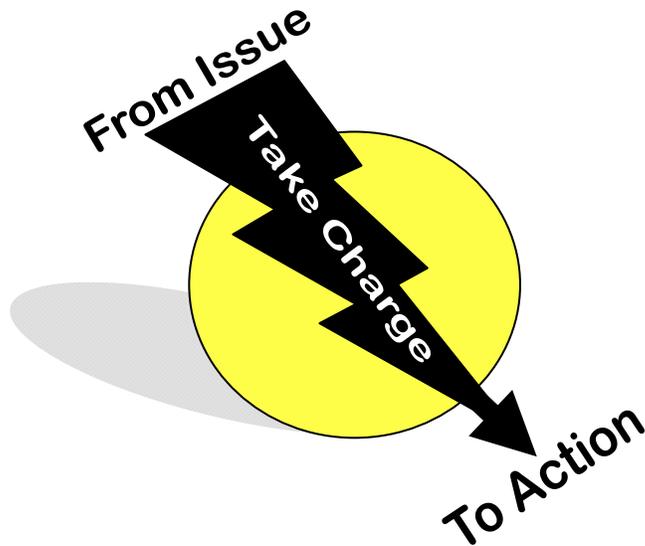


VIRTUAL LOBBY DAY



March 19, 2013

EQUITY AND PREDICTABILITY OF SCHOOL FUNDING

Essentials for a sustainable future

TESTING, EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Seeking strategies for improved learning

New York State

PTA[®]

everychild.onevoice.[®]

ADVOCACY ALERT



March is PTA Advocacy Month

Equity and Predictability of School Funding; Testing, Evaluation and Accountability

Governor Cuomo states that “a strong effective school system is the hallmark of a healthy democracy” and calls for reform. He also calls upon us to work together to build a *New* New York. In order to accomplish either, we must:

- **Level (up) the playing field to ensure equitable access to a sound, basic education based on Regents graduation standards for every child.**
- **Build on a positive, solid base of who we are, our successes and what our schools are doing well.**

Our campaign is two-fold: a letter/postcard writing initiative and a Virtual Lobby Day.

Please, write letters and/or postcards to your representatives in Albany. You can use the attached letter and postcard or create your own using the issue brief/talking points included. Letters should be sent to all those listed on the reverse side, and your local area representatives. Have members sign several copies at your meetings, and send them all in one envelope. The postcard included should be duplicated on postcard sheets available at local office supply stores (remember to put on a stamp). Duplicate a batch and have members sign at your next meeting! Send out letters/postcards more than once. *The more Albany hears from us, the stronger our message becomes.*

Virtual Lobby Day is *Tuesday, March 19th*. On that day we are asking all members to call, email and/or fax their legislators. Tell them you support full funding for public schools and want to see restoration of education support. Contact all legislators listed, as well as your local representatives. *We need thousands of voices to ensure our message is heard.*

Together we can send a powerful message to Albany to:

- **Redirect education funds earmarked for competitive grants to promote equity!**
- **Shape strategies that will improve student learning!**
- **Engage parents as key partners in education reform!**

New York State

PTA

everychild.one voice.

In addition to contacting your local representatives, please also contact:

Governor Andrew Cuomo

Executive Chamber
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224
518-474-8390
www.governor.ny.gov/contact/GovernorContactForm.php

Senator Dean Skelos

Senate Republican Conference Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 909
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-3171
skelos@nysenate.gov

Senator Jeffrey A. Klein

Independent Democrat Conference Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 913
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-3595
jdklein@senate.state.ny.us

Assemblyman Sheldon Silver

Speaker of the House
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-3791
speaker@assembly.state.ny.us

Senator John J. Flanagan

Chair of the Senate Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 805
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-2071
flanagan@senate.state.ny.us

Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan

Chair of the Assembly Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 836
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-4851
nolanc@assembly.state.ny.us

NYS Assembly website: www.assembly.state.ny.us

NYS Senate website: www.senate.state.ny.us

Issues Brief: Equity and Predictability of School Funding

Equity and Predictability of funding are essential to achieving and sustaining NYS's goal of maximizing each child's potential

New York is an extraordinarily diverse state that educates children of all abilities from families of all compositions. Our communities are rich, poor, urban, rural and of every possible shade in-between. In 2007 the NYS legislature responded to a 2003 Court of Appeals finding that the NYS Constitution guarantees each child access to a sound basic education by adopting a “foundation” formula designed to assure access to sufficient resources to deliver on that guarantee. In the face of economic realities, however, the original four-year phase-in of the foundation plan has been severely altered in a manner that has rendered full phase-in of the concept essentially meaningless. The imposition of strict limits on local property tax growth, combined with increased expenses from health and retirement system costs over which schools have minimal control, are driving an increasing number of school districts to the brink of educational insolvency. With limited funding available to address the combination of constitutional guarantees and increased performance expectations, existing inequities in the race to achieve excellence are increasing as illustrated dramatically by district-to-district differences in student performance and graduation rates. An effective response to these challenges requires equitable access to resources as well as the predictability essential to planning and funding successful long-range strategies.

The governor’s Executive Budget proposes an \$889 million education aid increase for 2013, a welcome improvement to cuts in previous years. A mere 30% of that amount, however, would go to increases for general operating purposes. This amount doesn’t begin to permit lower wealth schools to close the overall resource gap. Aid distributed using this formula is actually the result of two formulas, one that calculates a sufficient and equitable aid entitlement and a second that reduces that entitlement to a level deemed affordable by the legislature. In spite of measures designed to provide greater increases to school districts of high need and low wealth, the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) reduces entitlements for high need/low wealth schools more than for other districts. As a result, while New York schools have lost more than 30,000 positions over the past three years, our neediest communities have had to cut more staff, make greater budget reductions and deplete more of their reserves in order to stay within local limits on property tax increases.

In the spring of 2012, Governor Cuomo appointed a NYS Education Reform Commission to examine opportunities to improve school performance while containing costs. The Commission issued a preliminary report in December 2012 and will issue a final report at the end of 2013. The preliminary report contained a number of promising recommendations that the governor has proposed to fund with \$75 million in one-year grants. Recognizing the pressure on school districts through increased health and retirement benefit costs, the governor also proposed a one-year fiscal stabilization program to be funded through a one-year appropriation of \$203 million. Each of these proposals would be funded as additions to the state support capped by growth in personal income.

Some communities can and do devote more local resources to their schools than others. Yet current rules make it probable that this practice will not be sustainable. More importantly, public education cannot be allowed to become a battleground of the haves and the have-nots. Nor can we be swayed by claims to provide equitable access for all by taking from those who have more to provide for those who have less. As a state, we should take pride in pointing to the success of some districts as we work to lift every child in every district. The highest priority of the Legislature and Regents must be to address gaps in equity and predictability in a manner that honors the promise of a sound basic education for each child. To achieve this end, we propose:

- The Governor proposes funding of several initiatives outside of the income growth cap on state support. We applaud the governor for recognizing the need for these investments that are necessary to protect New York’s investment in public education.
- Funding a free and equitable public system of education is a state responsibility. Competitive grants can serve a valuable function in supporting creativity but the state’s first responsibility is to address unacceptable inequities in funding. Until equity and predictability are a reality for every school district,

appropriations intended for competitive grants, whether within or outside income growth caps, should be redirected to promote equity through the foundation formula.

- Funding that lacks predictability is inefficient and costly. Since grants are typically funded for specific time periods we recommend that competitive grants be used only to address short term objectives. Longer term initiatives should be funded through an equitable general aid formula.
- Funding without predictability adversely affects essential long-range planning. Current law limits increases in state support for schools to personal income growth in the previous year. This strategy creates the potential for large year to year variations. The Medicaid support program, on the other hand, relies on a ten-year service cost average. While we do not support limits on the state's important investment in education, if such limits are to be imposed, we would urge use of a ten-year rolling average increase in personal income growth.
- We continue to oppose the severe restrictions to local control represented by the tax levy cap. While we do not expect limits on local property tax growth to be discontinued any time soon, we urge support of the inherent fairness of counting each individual's vote equally by replacing the current super majority required for a cap over ride with a simple 50% majority.
- The NYS Commission on Education Reform has provided valuable service that the governor has reflected in his Executive Budget. We commend this work, believing that the charge to this commission captures the essential questions surrounding education reform, and urge support for their continued efforts.

If we truly expect to fulfill New York's constitutional promise to provide every child a sound basic education, it must become the mandate of every decision and policy maker, education partner, community and family to work to ensure the resources that will fulfill that promise for every child.

Talking Points: Equity and Predictability of School Funding

- The Governor proposes funding of several initiatives outside of the income growth cap on state support. We applaud the governor for recognizing the need for these investments that are necessary to protect New York's investment in public education.
- Funding a free public system of education sufficient to meet NYS constitutional guarantees is a state responsibility. Competitive grants can serve a valuable function in supporting creativity, but the state's first responsibility is to ensure access to quality education for every child in every school district. Until that responsibility is met, appropriations considered for competitive grants, whether within or outside income growth caps, should be redirected towards meeting that primary obligation through the phased elimination of Gap Elimination Adjustments (GEA) to foundation formula entitlements.
- Funding that lacks predictability is inefficient and costly. Since grants are typically funded for specific time periods we recommend that the only use of short-term grant funding should be to achieve short-term goals. Long-term initiatives should be funded through the general aid formula.
- Funding that lacks predictability adversely affects necessary long-range planning. Current law limits increases in state support for schools to the rate of personal income growth in the previous year. This strategy creates the potential for large year to year fluctuations in that support. In contrast, the Medicaid support program bases its increases on a ten-year average of service costs. We do not support limits on the state's important investment in education, but if such limits are to be imposed, we would urge use of a ten-year rolling average increase in personal income growth.
- We continue to oppose the severe limitations to local control represented by the property tax levy cap. While we do not expect limits on local property tax growth to be discontinued any time soon, we urge you to endorse the inherent fairness in counting each individual's vote equally by replacing the 60% super majority currently required for a cap override with a simple 50% majority.
- The NYS Commission on Education Reform has provided a valuable service that the governor has reflected in his Executive Budget. We commend this work, believe that the charge to this commission captures the essential questions surrounding education reform and urge support for their continued efforts.
- New York's public schools have seen a loss of more than 30,000 staff positions and reductions and/or elimination of programs such as art and music education, technology, physical education, and extracurricular and sports programs. These "live" skills courses and activities are often what keeps more marginal students engaged and in school. *While many school districts statewide are experiencing these reductions and losses, they are greatest in our low wealth, high need rural and urban areas.*
- It is often difficult to attract and retain highly qualified teachers/staff to low-performing districts, many of which are within low wealth, high need communities. *The ability to turn around these schools, when they are incurring the greatest dollar loss, is sharply undermined as their ability to retain talented staff or build quality curriculum/program is diminished.*
- In 2003, the NYS Court of Appeals interpreted the NYS Constitution as guaranteeing every child a sound basic education. Currently, the rigor of standards and assessments is being increased. If the state continues to fund its schools inadequately, the ability for students to meet these challenges and be considered college/career-ready, particularly in high need, low wealth districts, will be diminished or eliminated. *The highest priority of the Legislature and Regents must be to address the equity/adequacy gap in a manner that honors the promise of a sound basic education for each child.*

Issues Brief: Testing, Evaluation and Accountability

High stakes decisions based on student testing results need to be continually evaluated to ensure that education reforms are producing their intended results

Federal mandates emanating from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to The Top (RTTT) have resulted in a variety of high-stakes educational decisions based on student assessments. Such measures have resulted in sanctions on school buildings and districts that fail to achieve Annual Yearly Performance goals. Requirements associated with RTTT now extend similar sanctions to the individual educator. Local school districts have often responded to this situation by reducing or eliminating instructional time in subjects like art, music, science and physical education in favor of concentrated instruction and test preparation in areas such as math and language arts.

NYS PTA has historically supported the establishment of high academic standards as well as appropriate use of standardized tests to assess student progress, so long as their prime purpose and use serves to improve the overall quality of learning. Parents, educators and policy makers, however, have raised concerns that overemphasis on standardized test results as the basis for high-stakes decisions affecting students and others is eroding access to a well-rounded education. NYS PTA encourages positive education reform that stresses the education of the whole child, reduces the achievement gap among various student groups, results in students who are college and career ready, and recognizes families and parents as essential partners in the education process.

NYS PTA supports legislation and policies that enable state and local officials to design a comprehensive and effective multi-pronged approach to meaningful pupil assessment and educator evaluation. The measures of student, educator or school district accountability should be reliable and valid and include multiple measures. They must also be designed to foster partnerships between school and families and form the basis for developing strategies that will improve student learning as well as the methods and individuals on whom that learning depends. To these ends, we propose:

- *New York State must support implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and efforts by state and federal agencies to improve learning based on these standards. However, the timetable for use of accompanying student assessments must reflect delivery of relevant curriculum and instructional methods prior to that assessment.*
- *If significant state aid decisions are to be based on implementation of the student and educator assessments, the state must periodically conduct and the legislature must fund a thorough independent evaluation of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process, including the role of testing and its effects on students and educators.*
- *Education of the whole child recognizes the importance and value of all developmental facets of children. Rather than reduce academic accountability to a narrow testing of reading and math, resources must be invested to assess and support development of the whole child.*
- *We support the establishment of a strong, effective evaluation system for educators but believe that too little attention has been given to development of non-testing measures of performance that directly respond to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards and teacher standards adopted by the NYS Board of Regents.*
- *While it is appropriate to share broad results of student testing and its use in assessing educator performance, any public release of such data that would interfere with the essential goal of improving instruction must not be permitted.*

Political initiatives whose effectiveness has been measured using high stakes student testing have changed the landscape of education in New York State and across the nation. The effects of some of these changes may be unintended, but when used improperly, can actually interfere with educational improvement. NYS PTA supports the continued development and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards and the academic challenge needed to compete in a global society. We also support the need for meaningful pupil assessment and educator accountability. Current trends unfortunately exaggerate the use of narrowly defined results to judge the educational performance of student and teacher. We urge legislative support for initiatives that encourage the student and educator creativity essential to educating the whole child.

Talking Points: Testing, Evaluation and Accountability

- *Optimism and high expectations will lead to positive, productive outcomes.* Design, construction and implementation of curriculum and instruction that correspond to Common Core standards are essential to those outcomes but require time and dollars to achieve their intended goals.
- *Student assessments built around Common Core standards will challenge students to reach higher levels of achievement.* To be constructive and productive, we must learn from our failures while building on our successes. Any assessment that is imposed before new curriculum and instruction have been introduced, however, is unfair and counter-productive to positive growth.
- *If significant state aid decisions are to be based on implementation of new student and educator assessments, the state must periodically conduct and the legislature must fund a thorough, independent evaluation of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process, including the role of testing and its effects on students.* What the state demands of schools and students is challenging and appropriate. If the state is prepared to require assessment of schools using rigorous accountability standards, it should be prepared to apply such standards equally to those who legislate them.
- *Rather than reducing accountability to a narrow testing of reading and math skills, resources must be invested to develop means to assess and support development of the whole child.* Our nation's success has been built on creativity and community effort. The fact that these qualities are difficult to measure doesn't mean that instruction and assessment in these areas should be sacrificed.
- *Too little attention has been given to development of non-testing measures of performance that directly respond to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards and teacher standards adopted by the NYS Board of Regents.* These standards, which assess 60% of each educator's performance evaluation, were prepared following extensive study. The development and implementation of reliable and valid assessment tools to measure performance under these standards need to be given the highest priority.
- *Successful students and successful schools rely on the collaboration and investment of all stakeholders. In order to provide a sound basic education that prepares students to meet the Regents graduation standards and to be college and career ready, we must share accountability and each hold ourselves accountable.* For this reason, New York State must adopt standards for family and parent engagement and prepare educators and parents alike to assume successful roles in this partnership.
- *Public release of student and educator performance data must not be permitted to interfere with the essential goal of improving instruction.* While public access to broad results of student testing is essential to demonstration of accountability, these results must be used to foster collaborative efforts to improve instruction and learning, not detract from that collaboration.
- *Nations such as Finland, Singapore and South Korea that are ranked highly in education attainment not only consider investment in education a national priority, but also hold the teaching profession in the highest regard. We need to recognize schools that are high achieving and lift up the rest; moreover, we need to view the many thousands of educators deserving of respect, gratitude and compensation as critical stakeholders and partners in education reform and achievement.*

Date: March 18, 2013

The Honorable _____

Address: _____

Dear _____

As one of more than 300,000 New York State PTA members, I am writing to express my views on the messages contained in the proposed 2013-14 Executive Budget. Following several years of budget freezes and historic aid reductions, proposals that include any increase in public education support are welcome. With a proposed increase of \$889 million, this Executive Budget reflects the governor's plans to improve student outcomes, support sustainable cost growth, equitably distribute aid and begin implementation of Education Reform Commission recommendations. We agree with the governor's conclusion that to be competitive in a global economy, our schools and our educators must be accountable to our children. We also believe that accountability is a shared responsibility that must begin with a predictable, level playing field and bring State policymakers together with educators, communities and parents in a common effort to chart a successful future for our children. We ask that you consider the following thoughts and modifications to the governor's proposal.

Equity and Predictability of School Funding: We applaud the governor for introducing new initiatives in response to preliminary recommendations of the Education Reform Commission and for funding these recommendations outside legislated state aid caps. Many of these proposals, however, take the form of temporary competitive grants that fail to adequately address current funding inequities and offer no long-range predictability. We appreciate the governor's intent to fund new and promising ideas, but with a mere 30% of the Executive Budget increase devoted to general operations, we conclude that the higher priority must be to use funding increases to promote equity and predictability in the general operating aid formula. Until these goals can be achieved for every district, we ask that competitive grant funding be allocated instead to offset Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) reductions to basic foundation aid.

Testing, Evaluation and Accountability: Federal mandates emanating from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT) have resulted in a variety of high stakes decisions based on student test results. In response to fears over school or individual educator sanctions, many school districts have focused undue attention on targeted instruction and student preparation for testing in math and language arts while curtailing learning opportunities in other essential areas. NYS PTA supports in implementation of instruction based on Common Core standards combined with meaningful pupil assessment and educator evaluation. However, we believe it is critical that student assessments and any programs that use those assessments to evaluate school and educator performance must:

- Be multi-pronged, reliable, and valid
- Be themselves regularly and independently evaluated
- Recognize the value of non-test measures of educator performance, such as classroom observation
- Be released to public scrutiny only to the extent that public scrutiny does not interfere with the primary goal of using such data to improve student learning

In the end, if we are to elevate achievement, while protecting the creative and innovative core of our American culture, we must focus on educating the whole child while recognizing that successful education requires a true partnership between schools, families, and primary caregivers. The most significant progress will be possible only when all parties are challenged, engaged, optimistic and guided by the same vision.

Sincerely,

Name (print) _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Dear _____,

Date _____

I am writing to express concerns with equity and predictability over the manner in which the 2013-14 Executive Budget proposal would distribute aid to school districts.

While we applaud the governor for introducing a number of new and worthwhile concepts that recognize challenges faced by school districts, the proposal doesn't do enough to address existing problems with aid distribution. We ask that you help to remedy this problem in two ways:

- Give school districts greater revenue predictability by calculating the cap on increased aid to school districts using a ten-year average in personal income growth (similar to the methodology used for Medicaid increases) rather than a one-year average
- Use proposed temporary grant funding both inside and outside of the growth cap to create greater equity and predictability for all schools by reducing Gap Elimination Adjustments (GEA) and accelerating full implementation of the foundation aid formula

Name: _____

Address: _____



Signed: _____

Dear _____,

Date _____

I am writing to express concern over the impact that decisions linking high stakes student testing with individual teacher and principal evaluations will have on our educational programs.

With concerns related to test validity and reliability, excessive time devoted to student test preparation and unacceptable narrowing of school curriculum, *we seek funding for an ongoing independent evaluation of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process and the strategy that presently withholds funding from schools unable to agree on negotiated plans to implement this process* AND your support for:

- Introducing Common Core-based curriculum, assessment and educator evaluation in a considered, timely manner that will offer the best opportunity for educational success
- Programs designed to develop the skill of administrators/evaluators in effectively measuring educator performance for the 60% portion of educator evaluations that is separate from use of student testing

Name: _____

Address: _____



Signed: _____



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